

ARMING OF FORT ADAMS.

[To accompany Joint H. Res. No. 79.]

PAPERS

ACCOMPANYING

JOINT RESOLUTION

IN RELATION TO

The arming of Fort Adams.

JUNE 9, 1862.—Ordered to be printed.

THE DEFENCES OF NARRAGANSET BAY.

Letter from Mayor Cranston.

NEWPORT, January 6, 1862.

To the Editor of the Journal:

Agreeably to your request, I herewith furnish you a map of our coast from Point Judith to Seconnet Point, which will show the most important points where redoubts, &c., should be erected, and also the points where the east and west passages should be protected by floating steam batteries, &c.

Fort Adams, which is about one mile, by water, southwest from this city, is one of the largest and best-constructed forts in the United States, and can mount four hundred and sixty-four guns of different calibre. At present there are mounted, as follows: five 32 barbette, eighteen 32 casemate, sixteen 24 barbette, eleven 24 casemate, nine 24 howitzers for flank defence, one 8-inch mortar, two 12 field howitzers, two 6 field guns; total number mounted, 64. Not mounted: seventy-seven 32-pounders, fifteen 24-pounders, forty-eight 24-pound howitzers for flank defence. Whole number of guns at the fort, 204. There are forty-eight carriages, barbette and casemate, that have no guns mounted on them; there are ninety-two guns without carriages. The carriages are old; most of them might be used in an emergency, but would stand but little service. If the fort was fully supplied with guns it would require about five thousand men, making due allowances for killed and wounded, to work the guns, &c., in a full

engagement. It would probably be a rare instance where all the guns would be worked at the same time; as a general thing, not unless a formidable fleet should consolidate its fire upon the fort. The naval fleet of an enemy, in consequence of the great improvements in projectiles, &c., during the past few years, could easily, by shells, &c., destroy this city, and, perhaps, silence the guns of Fort Adams, or, at all events, enter the harbor of Newport by the main passage, and thus lay not only Newport, but Providence, Warren, Bristol, and Fall River, under contribution. I mean that this could probably be done, unless Fort Adams was sustained by other works along the coast, as I shall directly describe. It was always contemplated by engineer officers that Fort Adams would be sustained by permanent or temporary works in various directions along the coast, as occasion might require.

In case of war with a foreign power the harbor of Newport would probably be the first that the enemy would attempt to enter and hold, from the fact that it is the most easy of access at all seasons of the year, and in all weather on the Atlantic coast; it is commodious and safe, and would make a most desirable naval depot for them; then, again, its central position between New York and Boston, if occupied by the enemy, would enable them to control almost the whole of New England, and materially affect New York, and other portions of the north. It will thus be seen that it is of the most vital importance for the welfare of our country that the coast around Newport should be *immediately* and strongly fortified; comparatively speaking, this can be speedily done, and at not a very heavy expense. The additional guns at Fort Adams should be promptly furnished—a portion of which should be rifled, as all those now there are the smooth bore. Fort Walcott, on Goat island, should be placed in a State of defence; Fort Dumplings, on Conanicut island, southwest from Goat island, and also Rose island, northwest from Goat island, should each have a battery. The Dumplings occupies a commanding position, and could easily be put in a state of defence, as there is a redoubt already there. If these points were properly fortified, the enemy would be subjected to a terrific and probably destructive cross-fire, as will be seen by reference to the map. The distance from Fort Adams to the Dumplings is about seven-eighths of a mile; between these points the water is from four to twenty-nine fathoms, the water being deepest about midway.

Strong works, with a powerful battery, should be erected on Dutch island, which is located in the west passage, about midway from the island of Conanicut to the main land on the west, called Narraganset; this is a very important point for a powerful battery, as it could rake the whole passage. Below Dutch island redoubts should be constructed on the island of Conanicut, and on Narraganset, on the main land opposite. Several old stone-loaded ships should be anchored between the two redoubts, or in that vicinity, prepared to be quickly sunk in an emergency. There should also be two or three iron-clad steam floating batteries to be used in this passage; they might be made of the roughest materials, provided they were strong;

if furnished with engines that would move them four or five knots an hour they would answer an excellent purpose, as they would only require sufficient steam power to keep them in moderate motion in the bay as occasion might require in an engagement: these could be speedily and cheaply furnished.

In the east passage similar redoubts to those which I have already described for the west passage should be erected on the Middletown and Little Compton sides of the river; old stone-loaded ships should here be anchored, to be sunk, as aforesaid, in an emergency; and two or three similar steam floating batteries should be placed as indicated on the map, which would be very effective in preventing the enemy from landing in surf boats along the line of the river on either side. Temporary earthworks should be erected from Brenton's Reef to Sachuest Point; a small number of these could easily prevent the enemy from landing in surf boats or otherwise on the shores and beaches between the last-named points.

It is of the utmost importance to defend the west passage; for however strongly the main entrance to the harbor might be protected by Fort Adams and temporary works to be erected at other points bordering on the inner harbor as I have described, large ships-of-war could pass up said passage unless fortified, as the water in the channel is nine fathoms deep, and this within a quarter of a mile of the island of Conanicut; if they passed up there is ample and safe anchorage for a formidable fleet in the vicinity of the island of Prudence. Large-sized gunboats could proceed far up Providence river into Warren river, Bristol harbor, and up Mount Hope bay to Fall River.

The principal points where defences are required, and would be most effective, are marked on the map, so that the reader can easily understand my descriptions by examining that. The semi-circular marks on the map on Conanicut island, Narraganset, Dutch island, Dumplings, Rose island, Middletown, Little Compton, and from Brenton's Reef to Sachuest Point, indicate the places at or near which redoubts, &c., should be constructed. The cross-lines between Fort Adams, the Dumplings, Goat island, and Rose island indicate the terrible cross-fire which a ship or fleet would be subjected to in attempting to enter this harbor by the main passage, if the above-named points were fortified as I have suggested. The dotted lines in the east and west passages show about where the old stone-loaded ships should be anchored, and the † above said dotted lines show about where the steam floating batteries would probably be most effective in an engagement. Ships attempting to pass up the west passage, if it was thus fortified, would encounter a severe cross-fire from Dutch island, the steam floating batteries, and the redoubts on Conanicut island and Narraganset.

There are about four hundred persons connected with the Naval Academy, under its scientific and accomplished superintendent, Capt. George S. Blake, who is assisted by some of the ablest officers in the service; a large proportion of those belonging to the academy have had more or less experience in gunnery. In an emergency this

whole force could be placed in Fort Adams in thirty minutes ; an equal number, consisting of the Newport Artillery, Newport Artillery Old Guard, companies A, B, C, D, E, F, and the Sprague Zouaves, of the National Guard, could be placed there in about the same time ; other volunteers could be easily supplied from the city for its defence until assistance could be had from other portions of the State.

There has been a guard, day and night, at Fort Adams for the last year, placed there by me early in January last, by instructions from the War Department, and continued until the fort was temporarily transferred by the War Department to the Navy Department, in May last, for the accommodation of the Naval Academy ; since that time it has been in charge of Capt. Blake, Superintendent of the Naval Academy ; during several weeks past no one has been allowed to visit the fort unless by a permit from the proper naval or civil authorities. Signals between the fort, the frigate Constitution, and the city, are arranged ; by these, in a very short time, the whole force of the academy and a good force from this city can be placed in the fort, as I have before stated.

In the erection of works for the defence of the coast, I am confident that it would afford great pleasure to Cap. Blake and his officers to render any assistance in their power that might be required. It is a matter of so much importance that I trust the United States government will order the necessary work to be performed immediately. An engineer officer could easily estimate the expense of the proposed work, and the probable time that would be required for its execution. I am sustained in my views of this matter, as herein expressed, by distinguished scientific officers of the army and navy.

I have been as full and clear in my description of the coast and the defences which it requires as time will permit ; if my official duties were not so numerous and pressing, especially at this time, I would have been more minute, but I think that my illustrations are sufficiently explicit for all practical purposes.

WILLIAM H. CRANSTON, *Mayor.*

General Totten's report.

The following passage is extracted from an elaborate report on our national defences made by Chief Engineer J. G. Totten, in 1851, to Mr. Conrad, then Secretary of War :

“As a harbor, Narraganset bay is acknowledged by all to be the best on the whole coast of the United States, and it is the only close man-of-war harbor that is accessible with a northwest wind, the prevailing and most violent wind of the inclement season. Numerous boards and commissions, sometimes composed of naval officers, sometimes of army officers, sometimes of officers of both services, have, at different times, had the subject of this roadstead under consideration, and all have concurred in recommending, in strong terms, that it be made a place of naval rendezvous and repair, if not a great

naval depot; one or more of these commissions preferring it for the latter purpose to all other positions. These recommendations have not been acted on, but it is next to certain that a war would force their adoption upon the government. With the opening of this anchorage properly defended, hardly a vessel-of-war of ours could come, either singly or in small squadrons, upon the coast in the boisterous season without arriving at this port on account of the comparative certainty of an immediate entrance. And this would be particularly the case with vessels injured by heavy weather or in conflict with an enemy; with vessels bringing in prizes or pursued by a superior force.

“This use of the port would almost necessarily bring with it the demand for the means of repairing and refitting; and the concentration of these upon some suitable spot would be the beginning of a permanent dock yard.

“For the same reason that ships-of-war would collect here, it would be a favorite point of rendezvous for privateers and their prizes, and a common place of refuge for merchantmen.

“From this, as a naval station, the navigation of Long Island sound, and the communication between this and Martha’s Vineyard sound or Buzzard’s bay might be well protected; New London harbor would be covered; this navy yard would command southwardly, as that from Hampton roads northwardly, the great inward curve of the coast between Cape Cod and Cape Hatteras, the influence of which command over the blockading operations of an enemy will be apparent, when it is considered that the only harbors of refuge left to him will be the Delaware, Gardner’s, and Buzzard’s bays and Martha’s Vineyard sound.

“The bays just mentioned belong to the class which, being too wide for complete defence by batteries, must call in such auxiliary defence as the navy may supply; and, in reference to their defence by these means, nothing can be more important than the fortifications at Narraganset roads, because all but Delaware bay, including an anchorage for ships-of-war under Block island, would be commanded by a single squadron of those floating defences lying in these roads. To a squadron of steam batteries, for instance, lying under the fortification it would be a matter of little consequence into which of the above anchorages an enemy should go, all being within reach of three or four hours, and some within sight. We will here observe, by the way, that this use of floating defences is in accordance with the principle before insisted on; they are not expected to close the entrance into these several bays, that would require a squadron for each at least equal to the enemy’s; but as the enemy goes in merely for rest or shelter, and there is no object that he can injure, he may be permitted to enter, and our squadrons will assail him only when the circumstances of wind, weather, &c., give all the advantages to the attack. The fortification of Narraganset roads is, therefore, in effect, a most important contribution toward the defence of all the neighboring anchorages. But the same properties that make Narraganset roads so precious to us would recommend them to the enemy also;

and their natural advantages will be enhanced in his eyes by the value of all the objects these advantages may have accumulated therein.

"If this roadstead were without defence, an enemy could occupy it without opposition, and by the aid of naval superiority form a lodgement on the island of Rhode Island for the war. Occupying this island with his troops, and with his fleets the channels on either side, he might defy all the forces of the eastern States; and while from this position his troops would keep in alarm and motion the population of the east, feigned expeditions against New York or against more southern cities would equally alarm the country in that direction; and thus, though he might do no more than menace, it is difficult to estimate the embarrassment and expense into which he would drive the government.

"It has been alleged that similar consequences would flow from the occupation of other positions, (such for instance as are afforded in the bays just mentioned,) and that therefore the defence, in a strong manner, of Narraganset roads is useless. Even allowing that there are other inaccessible positions whereon an enemy might place himself, is it a reason, because the foe can in spite of us possess himself of comparative unsafe and open harbors, that we should not apply to our own uses, but yield up to him, the very best harbor on the coast?—that we should submit to capture and destruction the valuable objects that accumulate in consequence of the properties of the harbor?

"But it is believed that none of the outer and wider harbors will answer for such an establishment as we have supposed, nor for any other purpose than an occasional anchorage for ships-of-war; and for these reasons, among others, that although ships-of-war might possibly ride in these broad waters at all seasons, it would seem to be a measure of great temerity for transports to attempt it, except in the mildest seasons; and there can be but little doubt that a hostile expedition would resort to no harbor, as a place of rendezvous, unless it afforded sure protection to its transports, these being the only means by which ulterior purposes could be executed, or final retreat from the country effected.

"If, moreover, Narraganset roads became a naval station, or at least the station of a floating force designed to act against these outer waters, such an establishment by an enemy on other positions would at once be put upon the defensive and require the constant presence of a superior fleet, thus measurably losing the object of the establishment. Independent of deficient qualities as harbors, however, none of these bays would answer our purposes: First, because they cannot be securely defended; and second, because they are difficult of access from the main—the communication with them being liable to interruption by bad weather, and liable to be cut off by the enemy.

It seems quite evident that the circumstances involved in the occupation and defence of Narraganset roads will not be materially changed by the facilities of railroad communications; so far as numbers can aid in defensive arrangements, they could be supplied in due time and to the extent needed by the surrounding district and common modes of conveyance."

ENGINEER DEPARTMENT,
Washington, April 19, 1862.

SIR: I have the honor to return herewith the communication of the Rhode Island delegation in Congress, dated 6th February, on the subject of Fort Adams and the defences of Narraganset bay, referred to this office on the 18th instant for report, and to state as follows:

The communication recommends that the sum of one hundred thousand dollars be appropriated for Fort Adams, and states that the armament is very deficient, as well as the fort needing repairs. Since the letter was written fifty thousand dollars have been appropriated for the fort. It is therefore considered most expedient that the remaining fifty thousand dollars of the recommendation of the delegation, or such other sum as Congress may deem proper, be appropriated for the purpose of providing the required armament for the fort; and it is recommended that guns of large calibre, with their carriages, equipments, and ammunition, be supplied.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOS. G. TOTTEN,
Brevet Brigadier General and Colonel of Engineers.

Hon. EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington City, D. C., April 28, 1862.

GENTLEMEN: The Secretary of War directs me to acknowledge the receipt of your communication with regard to the condition of Fort Adams and the defences of Narraganset bay, and to say that it was referred to the chief of engineers, who has returned it, with the accompanying report, from which you will perceive that, since the date of your letter, fifty thousand dollars have been appropriated for the fort; and it is considered most expedient that fifty thousand dollars more, or such other sum as Congress may deem proper, be appropriated for the purpose of providing the required armament for the fort.

I have the honor to be your obedient servant,

P. H. WATSON,
Assistant Secretary of War.

Hons. JAMES F. SIMMONS, H. B. ANTHONY, W. P. SHEFFIELD, and G. H. BROWNE, *Washington, D. C.*

JOINT RESOLUTION FOR THE ARMING OF FORT ADAMS.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the sum of fifty thousand dollars be, and the same is hereby, appropriated, in addition to the sums already appropriated, for the purpose of providing a suitable armament for Fort Adams, in Rhode Island.

